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## MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release:

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### **Fair Housing: It's Not An Option . . . It's The Law** *Virginia celebrates Fair Housing Month, hosts Richmond conference*

**RICHMOND** – The Virginia Fair Housing Office announces Fair Housing Month, marking the 38<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Fair Housing Act. This year's theme – *It's Not An Option . . . It's The Law* – describes the role fair housing agencies play in ensuring every individual's and family's right to live where they choose, free from discrimination.

“Housing discrimination is not necessarily as blatant as a bigoted remark or a slammed door,” says Mary Broz, spokesperson for the Virginia Fair Housing Office. “Subtle discrimination – such as ‘no-children’ policies or denying reserved parking spaces for physically disabled tenants – is equally unfair and just as illegal.”

As part of the national observance, the Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) – the state agency responsible for enforcing fair housing laws through the Virginia Fair Housing Office – and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will host a fair housing conference on Wednesday, April 19.

**WHAT:**

Fair Housing Conference

**WHERE:**

Greater Richmond Convention Center

**WHEN:**

Wednesday, April 19, 2006

8:00 a.m. Registration

8:30 a.m. Welcome – Jay W. DeBoer, DPOR Director

9:00 a.m. Keynote – L. Douglas Wilder, Richmond Mayor

9:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Sessions on topics including discriminatory zoning ordinances and restrictive covenants; reasonable accommodation and modifications; ethnicity and fair housing; and fair housing enforcement.

**REGISTRATION (Seating is limited):**

1-800-842-2610, ext. 3787

[Toni.Schmiegelow@hud.gov](mailto:Toni.Schmiegelow@hud.gov)

[www.hud.gov/event\\_registration/index\\_2.cfm?state\\_VA](http://www.hud.gov/event_registration/index_2.cfm?state_VA)

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Virginia's fair housing statute prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, familial status (defined as having children under age 18), and elderliness (defined as age 55 and older). The law protects people from bias when trying to rent an apartment, buy a house, obtain a mortgage, or purchase homeowner's insurance. Fair housing requirements apply to all housing providers – property managers, owners, landlords, real estate agents, banks, savings institutions, credit unions, insurance companies, mortgage lenders, and appraisers.

**Individuals who believe they may be victims of housing discrimination should contact the Virginia Fair Housing Office toll-free at 1-888-551-FAIR (3247).** The agency offers free training and informational seminars to housing consumers and providers who wish to learn more about their rights and responsibilities under the Fair Housing Act.

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**About DPOR and Fair Housing**

The Virginia Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) regulates nearly 40 commercial occupations and certain professions. The agency licenses or certifies more than 300,000 individuals and businesses ranging from architects and contractors to real estate agents and cosmetologists.

DPOR investigates reports of regulatory violations by licensees; pursues complaints of criminal activity by unlicensed practitioners; responds to business-related consumer inquiries and requests for license checks; administers recovery funds for consumers harmed in contractor or real estate transactions; and conducts mediation services and public awareness campaigns.

The Virginia General Assembly established the Fair Housing Board in 2003. Prior to July 1, 2003, fair housing issues and cases fell under the jurisdiction of the state Real Estate Board. The Real Estate Board continues to handle cases involving real estate licensees or their employees. Each board investigates housing discrimination through the Virginia Fair Housing Office, which operates under the aegis of the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR).

For more information, visit DPOR online at [www.dpor.state.va.us](http://www.dpor.state.va.us).